SPOTLIGHT: Barheaded Goose *Anser indicus* By Siraj A. Taher

This column focuses on birds that are in the Red Data Book of BirdLife International as threatened / highly threatened species. Readers are requested to send information about these birds to the Society.

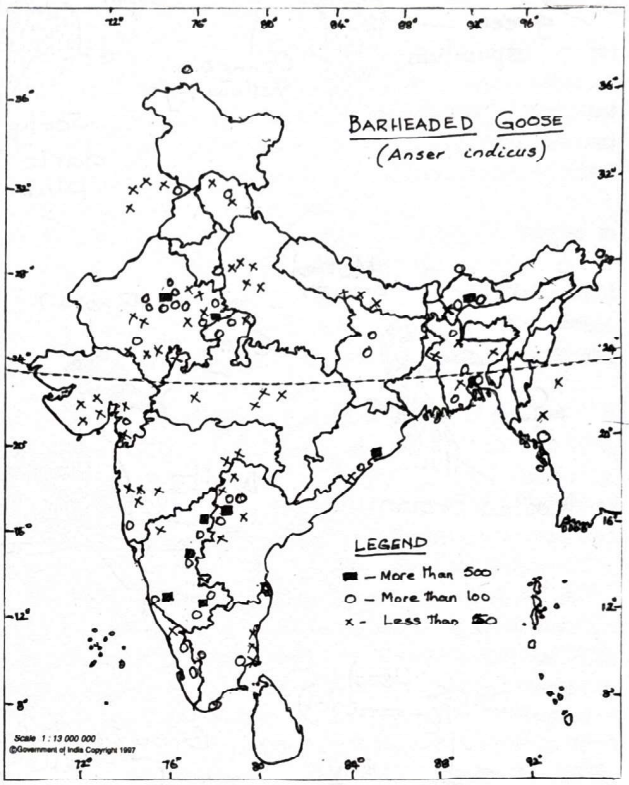
A pale grey and white goose. The head and throat are white and the neck is brown. There is a white stripe on each side of the neck and two black bars aon the head and nape. In flight the pale grey body, white head with black bars and dark wing tips are diagnostic. Bill and legs are yellow. Female and male look alike. It is found in large flocks or small parties and mostly seen on large rivers jheels and sandbars. They feed at night in fields on crops and grain causing considerable damage. Their food comprises of grass, tubers, tender shoots of wheat, pulses and other winter crops and also paddy.

In their breeding ground in Tibet and Central Asia, they seem confiding andtame but in their wintering grounds in Pakistan and India, are extremely cautious and wary wherever they are commonly hunted. In India they are known to breed only in Ladakh, at high elevations, between May-June. The nest is a thickly padded depression on the ground in which 4-6 eggs are laid. Nests are mostly constructed on grassy islands in lakes and are built close to one another. Incubation lasts for nearly 30 days and is done by the female only.

It is a migratory goose and arrives in Pakistan and N.W. India around October-November and usually leaves by end March when thousands travel northward over Nepal and Pakistan. Even though seemingly well spread over the northern regions from Pakistan, Punjab, Rajasthan and the Gangetic Plain to Assam and Bangladesh, it is not common in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and further South. In some years it is abundant especially in Chilka Lake (Orissa) and sporadic in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Not found in Sri Lanka and rare in Tamil Nadu.

In spite of this distribution, the Barheaded Goose is threatened mainly owing to habitat losses and disappearing wetlands. Probably extensive use of pesticides and insecticides is having an adverse affect but ths has to be studied and proven.

In Andhra Pradesh occassional sightings of small flocks have been made at several places. It is most regularly seen at the large waterbodies like Manjira Bird Sanctuary and the Singur Dam area. Small parties have been seen at Pocharam and in Warangal and West Godavari Districts. Old records from Andhra Pradesh report this bird from near Nellore, Cuddapah and from Hyderabad city. In recent years the number of Barheaded Geese has increased in South India, especially in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. There is only one population of this goose recognized and the trends seem to show stable numbers.



BIRD-*WORD*: A BIRDWATCHER'S LEXICON Compiled By S. Ashok Kumar

EPAULETTE Ornamental shoulder piece; ostentatious plumage of Birds of Paradise.

ESTIVATION Summer sleep (Opp: Hibernation).

EYE-RING Coloured feathers around the eyelids.

FAMILY A group of related genera in the animal kingdom having certain common characters is classified as family by taxonomist and the family names end with 'idea'.

FEATHER PULP The dermal papilla having blood capillaries nerves and connective tissues.

FILOPLUME It is the delicate, filament - like feathers at the base of the contour feathers. Filoplume has a hair-like stem with a tuft of filaments at its free end.

FLYWAY Flyway is the traditional and seasonal route followed by birds during their migration .

FURCULA It is the slender clavicle bones fused ventrally, and is also called wish bone or pulley bone.

GAMOSEMATIC DISPLAY Display which assists the female bird in selecting a mate for pair formation.

GIZZARD It is the second part of stomach which has heavy muscular walls.

GONYS Projection of the lower mandible found in the birds such as Skuas, Terns, Gulls.

GUANO Accumulated faecal matter of sea birds such as Gannets, Cormorants, Brown Pelicans, Peruvian Boobies, a major source of phosphorous and used as an agricultural fertiliser.

HALLUS Hind toe or first toe of a bird and in land vertebrates, the first digit of the hind limb.

HAMULI They are minute hooklets or barbules known as barbicels.

HANDLEY PAGE SLOTS The gaps in the wings of birds is called Handley Page slots which help reduce turbulence (See emargination).

HETEROCOELUS In cervical vertebrae of the bird skeletal system the anterior face of the centrum is concave from side to side and convex dorso-ventrally. This confers great flexibility and helps in pruning feathers in all parts of the body. All birds move their necks through 180° and the Wryneck (*Jynx*) 360°.

HUMERALS Humerals are the Feathers supported by humerus bone.